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CELEBRATIONS HERITAGE

## Hundreds attend a scaled-down Laval Hellenic Summer Festival



By **Martin C. Barry** July 8, 2021



*One thing that hadn't changed at this year's Hellenic Summer Festival: There was still plenty of souvlaki prepared by a crew of devoted kitchen volunteers. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)*

### Partyers hold a muted post-Covid celebration of Greek roots and heritage

While the crowd count was a lot lower than usual and there was no Canada Day cake, hundreds of people with Greek cultural roots did at least get out for three days last weekend to attend the annual Hellenic Summer Festival at Holy Cross Church in Chomedey, after a one-year hiatus because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And although there were no Greek folk dancers or singers flown in from Greece this year because of some ongoing sanitary restrictions, there was still lots of charcoal-broiled souvlaki and Hellenic music piped in from Greece on a live web connection.

#### **Covid rules followed**

As well, many of Laval's elected officials, election candidates and other dignitaries turned up for a special event on Saturday evening – bearing in mind perhaps that 2021 is an election year for municipal politicians.



*From the left, Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal president Andy Crilis, Nick Katalifos and Chomedey MNA Guy Ouellette are seen here with the National Assembly Medal presented by Ouellette to Katalifos at the Laval Hellenic Summer Festival. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)*

“This year we said let’s try having the festival, even though some people are still concerned about the Covid. So, we followed all the public safety rules,” said Denis Marinos, president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal’s Laval regional council.

### **Usually big crowds**

The Laval Hellenic Summer Festival is normally one of the biggest Greek cultural events in Quebec each year. People arrive from many areas of eastern Canada, eager to meet and greet old friends and members of their extended families.

In Laval there are an estimated 40,000 Greek residents. Arrangements were made to receive up to 700 people over three days at this year’s festival – a far cry from the thousands who normally attend the Hellenic Summer Festival.

### **No dancing this year**

“We’re not allowed to dance,” said Marinos, noting that particular rule. “But do have music live from Greece and people can enjoy it while sitting at the tables enjoying their food. And hopefully by next year this place will be rocking when things are back to normal again.”

***‘HOPEFULLY BY NEXT YEAR THIS PLACE WILL BE ROCKING WHEN THINGS ARE BACK TO NORMAL AGAIN,’ SAID DENIS MARINOS, PRESIDENT OF THE HCGM’S LAVAL COUNCIL***

Among the dignitaries were Laval city councillor for Chomedey Aglaia Revelakis, l'Abord-à-Plouffe councillor Vassilios Karidogiannis, Quebec MNA for Chomedey Guy Ouellette, Laval-Les Îles MP Fayçal El-Khoury, Vimy MP Annie Koutrakis, Senator Leo Housakos, Action Laval mayoralty candidate Sophie Trottier, Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal president Andy Crilis, Montreal city councillor for Parc Extension Mary Deros and English Montreal School Board director-general Nicholas Katalifos.

### **A medal for Katalifos**

A highlight Saturday evening was the presentation of the National Assembly Medal to Katalifos by Ouellette. While Katalifos has been an educator and administrator at the EMSB for decades, he is also known for his leadership and support in the Montreal region's autism spectrum community, including the presidency of the Giant Steps School.

Ouellette pointed out that in receiving the National Assembly Medal, it was the second time Katalifos had been presented with a medal symbolizing the recognition of a constituted government assembly. Around three years ago, he was awarded the Senate 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Medal by Senator Leo Housakos.

### **'For the team'**

"I'm accepting this, but not just on my behalf, but also on behalf of the entire community that I've been working with," Katalifos said after accepting the medal, emphasizing a major project now underway at Giant Steps to build a new autism centre and school campus in east-end Montreal.

"It's an enormous group of people working on this – fifty, sixty strong," he said. "And that's why it's shaping up into such a success. Because everybody's working together."

### **MPs share their thoughts**

The dignitaries were invited by festival organizers to step up to the microphone to share some of their thoughts, including El-Khoury and Koutrakis.



*A large number of elected officials from the Laval area as well as other dignitaries turned out last Saturday evening at Holy Cross Church on Souvenir Rd. for day two of the Hellenic Summer Festival. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)*

"The Greek community is great and contributes to our diversity, to our progress, to our prosperity and you're doing a great job," El-Khoury said.

"I'm very proud to be here today," said Koutrakis, who served briefly as the HCGM's first woman president just before she was elected MP for Vimy in 2019.

"I hope you feel that as parliamentarians, we are here by your side and ready to serve."